

Butte-Silver Bow Study Commission Minutes

Meeting Date: February 2, 2005

Time: 1:42 p.m.

Place: Butte-Silver Bow County Courthouse, 1st Floor Conference Room

Call to Order: Chairman Bob Worley brought the meeting to order at 1:42 p.m. Chairman Worley proceeded to call roll with the following results:

Members Present: Tony Bonney, Ristene Hall, Wayne Harper, Dave Palmer, Meg Sharp, Cindi Shaw, Northey Tretheway, Bob Worley, and Shag Miller. Ron Rowling, the liaison, was also present.

Others Present: The Presenters, Ken Weaver and Judy Mathre

Purpose of the Meeting: To develop a survey to distribute to Butte-Silver Bow employees and a separate survey to distribute to the general population of Butte-Silver Bow.

Chairman Worley introduced Ken Weaver and Judy Mathre of the Local Government Center from Montana State University - Bozeman. Chairman Worley assigned the duty of the survey to Dave Palmer, the vice chairman. Ken Weaver sent a final report from the Anaconda/Deer Lodge opinion survey for everyone to review.

For the record, Ken Weaver introduced himself. He is a Senior Research Scientist/Associate at the Local Government Center that he and Judy founded 21 years ago. They both served on the Bozeman city commission and Judy has worked on the Bozeman study commission. Shag asked Mr. Weaver to describe his background. Ken Weaver reported that the center began in 1986; he was the chairman of the Political Science Department with an outreach obligation. They felt strongly about doing something for the local government. They thought they would bring the resources of the University to bear on the local government review process. He received his doctorate from the University of Washington and specialized in international relations with his field of experience. Mr. Weaver continued to summarize his background, the history of the local government review, and the creation of the Local Government Center.

Ken Weaver then began by saying that he has done 25-30 community surveys; most surveys were done by telephone. The first question the Study Commission needs to decide is how you are going to conduct the survey (mail out, face-to-face, or telephone). Telephone surveys work in a homogeneous community. In the past, if you pull 700-800 names out of a book, you will get 400 good responses (95 percent +/- 5 percent) of what's out there. Mr. Weaver now has very grave reservations about doing telephone surveys (cell phones). If you dial a 723- random number, you will probably get an answering machine. Will they call you back if you leave a message?

MSU – Billings (Craig) does phone surveys and so does the Bureau of Business Research in Missoula. He discussed the concerns of phone surveys today with cell phones, demographics, and the randomness, sample size (400 is the number of the sample size *if it is random*), etc. He talked about worthless surveys that were done. Cindi Shaw brought up the idea the Commission had of putting the survey in the water bill. Mr. Weaver said that that would work. It was mentioned that putting the survey in the water bills would exclude property owners that had wells and it would exclude renters.

You don't want to send the survey to the Carpenter's Union, the Acoma, or a church. You won't know who filled it out. Chairman Worley said that he talked to Butte-Silver Bow Water and they send out about 10,000 residential bills (12,000 ratepayers) commercial and rental properties with multiple billings.

Points to remember: Does it have a name on the statement? Make sure the government is okay with this. Chairman Worley already cleared it with the water company. It would go in the envelope with the water bill. Make sure you don't make the survey too long or you will lose the interest. It should be one page, double sided. Promise confidentiality. How do they get the instrument back to you? A stamped, pre-addressed envelope will be included with the survey. It doubles the mail bill (\$.74). Cindi Shaw asked if it could be put on a post card. The answer was you could. Mr. Weaver said to compress as much time as you can for the length of the survey (a two-week period). One week into the two-week period, follow-up with "By the way, thank you very much, we sent you a survey. It would be very helpful to this community, as we try to shape the future of this community".... To find out who didn't complete the survey, you would have to put a control number on the survey and then you are compromising their perception of confidentiality. Mr. Weaver said they recognize and trust you because you did some community education beforehand. The narrower the difference in the number of surveys sent out (50/55) lessens the confidence in the outcome, it is less random. This is a critical issue the Commission needs to consider. "What are you paying to get what information? And, how are you going to use it, and how accurate does it have to be?" The size you need to mail out is a guess – for Butte it would be 800 to get 400. Chairman Worley thought maybe 1,000. (Mr. Weaver stated that he believes the most sophisticated political community in Montana is Butte.) One reason he believes this is because at a Montana League of Cities and Towns meeting, he overheard some men talking and he mentioned to another person that those "guys are thick as flies" (Some one responded: it's still a community (they went to high school together)– good ol' boy). The relationships were still intact (it's a deep-seated community/ neighborhood, good ol' boy trust) -- trust from long-term relationships.

Chairman Worley noted that Dave Palmer is the Chairman for this survey. Dave Palmer did a sample survey that he will copy and distribute to the Commission for their review for changes and discussion. Dave said that they would put the survey in the water bill and the two questions would go to employees with their paychecks and then it will also be put on the website. This would be advertised in the paper.

Ken Weaver said the website was an interesting proposal. He suggests that you do it in a parallel fashion. With a website, you cannot use it to characterize the whole population – it is not random. What you can do is put it on the website and it will educate people. When you get down to what the survey means, you look at the sample and perhaps compare it to what you have received from the website and see if they are close. But, use the sample survey that you sent out as the basis for forming your opinion. The website advertises; however, it worries Mr. Weaver that people will use it as an alternative to the survey. They may feel that they won't have to answer the survey by mailing and filling it out; rather they would do it electronically. He doesn't know how you can do a survey that characterizes the whole population with a website. Shag brought up the fact that the website, like cell phones, may be biased. Ristene brought up the fact that you don't know if one person goes in and does multiple surveys. Ken Weaver responded that the same thing happened with a newspaper survey. Tony Bonney said that the water bill is not a true sample of the county. It includes only those under the water system. Tony is involved with the leadership group and they are trying to track the rural response. They would hand out a survey. Mr. Weaver asked what he meant by "hand out." Tony explained. Tony said it is important to include those outside the water system. You can characterize

Butte-Silver Bow by the 400 surveys if it is done right. The face-to-face, handout or website surveys are not surveys according to Ken Weaver. These are not surveys and you must not seek in your own internal decision making to base a decision upon anything other than the sample survey.

The education part of this process is the most important part. Northey had two comments: Do the survey the right way, don't augment with the Internet survey. He doesn't know how it would be comparable. Computer-friendly users would bias the survey.

Northey asked if a stratified survey should be considered. Mr. Weaver does not believe that Butte needs to do this type of survey. Ristene asked if they should consider working with a registered voter list rather than the water utility customers. Mr. Weaver replied that if you want to know how the people are going to vote you would do that, but if you want to know if they are satisfied with a particular service or not, it may not be the right way to do it. Tony Bonney brought up the fact that citizens in Divide might have different thoughts on issues than a citizen in Butte. If you want to get comments from folks, such as Divide, you would want to do a stratified sample. Define the population, and go after a sample of that subset. Cindi Shaw asked if Tony knew the number of people who had wells versus water system. Bob Worley brought up the people who live in the Blacktail area, Terre Verde Heights, etc. The Commission has to decide how to deal with this in a stratified way. Dave Palmer said that after he heard all the pros and cons, it sounds like they should do the telephone survey. If they break it up and have different service organizations ask the questions, he thinks it can be done in a short period of time and you would get a true sample. You could call Divide, Melrose, and Butte, etc. Wayne Harper brought up the point that you have to get away from skewed information. You don't need the people who don't want to talk to us; you want the people that usually don't show up to give their opinions. He cited an example of a School Board meeting regarding the St. Patrick's Day parade. Mr. Weaver stated that if you use a website, coupon mail-in, or newspaper as part of the survey, you can't hide those results. You are stuck with them. Northey said that it takes away the credibility of the survey. Wayne mentioned that according to the points that Ristene and Tony made, one-fifth to one-fourth of Butte-Silver Bow's population might be rural. "It's the size of the scoop, not the truck."

Bob Worley said that maybe we need to keep things in perspective. Do we want to use the other surveys as a balance or for education? Ken Weaver said that that would trouble him, but the best he knows/he thinks is a survey should be done that is designed to sample the several different communities in Butte-Silver Bow scientifically, a random sample drawing, that you can pool. It is important to have a name on the envelope no matter how you do it.

Ristene Hall, as a candidate, said that you can go to our sophisticated government and they can give you a list of names of everyone registered to vote in her district. For a small fee, they could put it on labels and give you one label per household. If there were four registered in a household, you get a label for all four or you can get "a" label per household. Ken Weaver said that you would want only one. We know that there is a high congruence between a man and wife – over 90 percent. It's a high predictability. Bob Worley asked if it should be sent to a post office box. Mr. Weaver said, in his opinion, it needs to come back to a trusted person or entity. The single most trusted institution in this community is probably the government – this government, not state or federal, this government. You want it coming back to a recognizable, trusted address (Butte-Silver Bow Local Government Study Commission). You can also go to the community after the survey is done in various groups and find out what everybody thought. It draws more interest from the community; it's a great tool for education, not just for you but also for the community according to Judy Mathre. The most important outcome if you use it in that way is to educate the community per Mr. Weaver.

Ken Weaver said that he would help with the methodology. He suggests that you don't throw out the telephone survey idea. He would go for it. Dave Palmer is in favor of the phone survey. Ristene stated that she is not in favor of a telephone survey. She shared her experiences as a county commissioner. Ken Weaver said their experiences have been different from her experiences. If you promise anonymity right upfront, they will answer the questions.

After a short break, Mr. Weaver began by saying that you can ask twice as many questions with a phone survey in about five minutes. Cindi mentioned that there is a whole different attitude about people receiving calls in the evening. Mr. Weaver said that you should compress the phone survey to five or six days, Monday through Saturday and do not call after 9:00 p.m. or between 6:00 and 7:00 p.m. Make sure you call so many calls during the day and so many at night. The survey will be tilted with a 60% response from women. The survey will be public. Do not ask a question that you cannot stand the answer. You will be stuck with the answers. If you already know the answer, why ask it. Don't ask a question you don't need an answer too. You need to know why you are asking that question and what is you going to do with the answers. Reading the first survey question regarding the chief executive being elected, appointed, or don't know, if 87% of respondents reply continue to elect the chief executive, even if there was a compromise or bias or survey took longer than intended, 87% is an overwhelming number. You won't make a mistake on that number. The answers won't come in like that, however.

Discussion continued about the types of questions and the types of results you might get, and the knowledge of the people being surveyed. Ken Weaver said an easy way to find out the knowledge of the individual being surveyed would be to ask: 1) what ward do you live in? And, 2) tell me the name of the representative of your ward. The survey is about how people feel. Give people the comfort to say they don't know the answer. Cindi Shaw asked what kind of results to expect regarding open-ended questions. Mr. Weaver said they are effective. He calls them trolling questions. Make sure you need to know the answer to the question. Bob Worley asked if the Commission should know where the people were living. Ken Weaver said, yes, he would like to look at the numbers very carefully. Also, an example of a telephone question would be: for each of the following department head positions, please tell me if they should be elected by the voters or appointed by the commissioners.

Talking a little bit more about education, what are you going to do with the results? The survey is done, you have a graphic presentation, you also have answers to questions about how you want to proceed, but who knows more about what needs to be changed in the Charter besides you (the Study Commission)? Tony Bonney said that the survey lets you know if there is a sense of change in the community. After you get the results, which are just the beginning, you have to translate the results into agreement. The first rule of government is to count the votes of the Study Commission regarding what they agree on to either make or not make any proposed adjustments to the Charter and put it on the ballot. Then the work is about half done. If you stop right there, nothing is going to happen. You have to educate the community. They (Ken Weaver, et al) have seen two charters adopted because of the education efforts of the government. A city put a question on a ballot recently to raise property taxes by 60 mils. It was about a 50% increase and the voters passed it because they knew what the money would buy because of education. Get out to service groups, etc.

Whatever you do don't say, "Please vote for or vote against." Say instead - please review. Shag asked if Ken Weaver was telling them that you couldn't say: The Study Commission recommends that you approve an animal control officer. Mr. Weaver replied that he didn't think he was. He said if you have any doubts about anything ask your county attorney. Judy said you can educate, but you can't

advocate. You can say you recommend it, that's not saying vote for it. Discussion followed regarding study commissioners serving on other boards, and conflicts of interest. There is a statute that requires legal interpretation.

Ken and Judy offered to help the Study Commission. It is up to the Commission to define how you would like them to help. He will help the Commission develop an instrument. They won't do tabulations. They would train callers, and build an instrument that was appropriate for callers. It would require two (2) or three (3) interactions between the Commission and Ken and Judy. The next step is to define a community group (mature ladies to do the calling). The training takes two hours. Then build a coding sheet. Ken said that if they were engaged as the Study Commission consultant, if you do a phone survey, it would be a single survey (one sample stratified) of the Butte-Silver citizens. Meg Sharp asked if you could get some of your questions answered from the website. He urges the Commission to only use the Internet to disseminate the results of the survey. The Internet is too easy to manipulate data if you perform a survey over the Internet. There are professional surveyors that will do it for approximately \$10,000 to \$20,000.

Ken said that if you email or telephone him or Judy with questions or call them, they would answer any questions they can. The Commission thanked Ken and Judy for coming and for sharing valuable information. Ken said he was pleased to be asked. He said he has great respect for this community and government.

The meeting continued. Dave Palmer asked everyone to review the questions on the survey. Discussion followed regarding putting a plan together, a calendar, and a budget. The first public meeting will be in the 3rd week in October. At that time they will need to have a draft put together on the changes that the Commission may want to suggest and also go over the first hearing and see what comes out of that meeting and put things together for the June primary. The calendar will be available for the February 3, 2005, meeting. During the summer, the Commission will meet every other week, and then go every week again in September. At the end of August, the Commission will have seven (7) to eight (8) weeks to prepare for the first public meeting at that time. The Commission will have to be ready to begin to draft something at the end of August. Northey brought up the idea of getting the public educated. Would a public meeting need to be set up before the October meeting to educate the people about the survey ahead of time? Chairman Worley said his thoughts were that people would be informed by news and other programs (KBOW or Focus). Dave Palmer replied that before we have a public hearing we should formulate a plan to submit to the people and that he didn't think that we could submit a plan until the survey was completed.

Chairman Worley made the point that the Commission was elected to listen to the people. So be good listeners wherever we are. He also mentioned that everyone could come up with more survey questions to bring to the February 3 meeting so that they can get the survey rolling. Dave Palmer stated that Jim Michelotti at Montana Tech might also be able to come up with help tabulating results in order to save money. Northey mentioned that we should identify the tasks that need to be done and step it through so the Commission knows what kind of work needs to be done and have time to think about it. Chairman Worley also mentioned that Northey completed a survey for his master's degree, so he volunteered Northey's services!

Adjourn: Dave Palmer moved to adjourn the meeting; Wayne Harper seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.